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## **Why farmer communities appreciate local varieties and local seed systems in Ethiopia?**

Local wheat varieties and other crops grown are highly preferred by farmers - because they have diverse agronomic values (adaptation to local soil and climate, less demanding in terms of inputs, withstanding stresses, and offering management flexibility); have diverse gastronomic values (multiple home uses, unique taste, and satiating quality); and ensure harvest security (seed, food, income) under changing climatic conditions.

The prime focus of small scale farmers is food production unlike the large scale commercial farms that are profit oriented. Farmers' food base relies on diversity farming and we cannot sustain production and enjoy life without these. Farmers' system is dynamic and diversity is increased through addition of new diversity. It is us - **the small scale farmers** - who produce food and continually feed the larger population in Ethiopia. However, our contribution is not given adequate recognition and as a result investments and other technical supports to this sector are minimal. Technologies are usually developed for commercial producers who produce seed as a commodity for sale targeted for profit making.

The local seed supply system meets the needs of small scale farmers in many ways. It offers wide range of choices for locally adapted seeds: it avails the right type and quality, in adequate quantity, at the right time and in affordable way. Seeds are wanted in relatively smaller volume and meet strategic needs of farmers the main ones being: meeting family food needs and adaptation to varying niche soil and agro-climatic condition.

It is through diversity that farmers also minimize risks and manage to cope with emerging challenges in agricultural production. Farmers' seed system allows saving of own seed and re-use every year indefinitely. It nurtures diversity and also allows farmers to exchange seeds with other farmers as and when needed. The Intellectual Property Right (IPR) system that was developed for those producing seed as commodity was imposed on small scale food producing farmers and that is creating confusion and challenges.

Food production is a basic human right and allows communities to support each other. Our ancestors have maintained wide range of diversity and passed down to us. We, the current generation of farmers, also need to maintain the diversity – our treasure, use and enjoy ourselves, and pass onto the next generation. For me this freedom of choice is the real Right of farmers i.e. choosing what we want to grow, eat and conserve. Farmers Right is also about dignity of farmers, food producers, and about maintaining the food base that enables sustainable production for current and future generation.